

1996

Ref:

A Concordat to provide a Framework for the Career Management of Contract Research Staff in Universities and Colleges

CVCP SCOP COSHEP BBSRC EPSRC ESRC MRC NERC PPARC The Royal Society The British Academy

1. This Concordat sets standards for the career management and conditions of employment of researchers employed by universities and colleges on fixed-term or similar contracts and funded through research grants or analogous schemes.
2. The research funding bodies signatory to this Concordat, will expect the universities and colleges to comply with the standards in paragraph 17, and will work closely with them to encourage, enable, and review the implementation of those standards.
3. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals (COSHEP), recognise the importance of establishing good management practice for contract research staff, and commend the standards to their members.
4. The arrangements for reviewing the Concordat are at paragraph 35.

BACKGROUND

5. Much research in universities and colleges is funded on a fixed-term basis by companies, research charities, the European Union, Government Departments and the Research Councils. In turn, the universities employ staff, generally known as "contract research staff", through fixed-term or similar contracts to carry out the research.
6. The parties to this Concordat recognise that fixed-term grants will continue to play a major part in the funding and prosecution of research in universities and colleges. Contract research staff make a significant contribution to that research. They can bring fresh ideas, expertise and knowledge, and enable universities and colleges to respond flexibly to the opportunities and the needs expressed by funding bodies.
7. The parties to this Concordat accept that:
 - those recruited to work as contract research staff should be able to benefit from the experience and use the period of employment to test out their suitability for further research inside or outside academia and to acquire a wider range of competencies and experience;

- some may have the potential to become research leaders or to obtain a longer- term university or college post which combines teaching and research;
- some may be employed by a university or college over the medium to long-term to work on a succession of research projects;
- many have an important role to play deploying their expertise and skills in a variety of employment, not only research and development, in industry, commerce, and the wider public sector.

8. However, the parties recognise that:

- an established career in academia or, exclusively, academic research, is realistic for only a minority;
- these limited opportunities and the insecurity arising from a succession of fixed- term contracts create tensions which have been compounded by the demands of other priorities on scarce resources, resulting in less investment in the career management and development of contract research staff than might otherwise have been the case;
- the result has been that some talented and trained staff may have been unnecessarily lost from research; others have moved from contract to contract for the want of informed guidance; and morale and overall productivity also suffer.

9. Accordingly, the challenge which is presented is to manage the tensions better, and to ensure appropriate investment in career management.

"REALISING OUR POTENTIAL"

10. The universities and colleges, as the employers, are responsible for the management of all of their staff. This includes terms and conditions of employment, staff development, and the proportions of established staff and contract research staff.

11. The Research Councils have an explicit responsibility for the production of trained people to meet the needs of research user communities in the universities and colleges, industry, commerce, and the wider public sector. The Councils also have an interest in contract research staff because the achievement of their missions through research conducted in the universities and colleges depends critically on the supply and development of well- trained, talented and motivated research staff within the universities. The Royal Society and other funding bodies have similar interests. In addition, the provision of grants, fellowships and other forms of research support by the funding bodies, and the terms and conditions on which the funds for those are given, influence directly the management of contract research staff by the university and college employers.

12. The White Paper "Realising Our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology" recognised that more effective career management of contract research staff, which enabled men and women with a talent for research to look forward to rewarding and satisfying careers in academia, industry, commerce and the wider public sector, would require action from the universities and colleges and the

funding bodies. It asked the Research Councils to work with university and college representatives with two objectives in view:

- i. more effective career management and development of contract research staff by the university and college employers;
- ii. the Research Councils' grant-making arrangements should help the universities and colleges discharge those responsibilities, and the Councils should look at the scope to put greater emphasis on longer-term or more personal forms of research support.

13. This Concordat provides a framework within which the universities, colleges, Research Councils and other funding bodies will work to achieve those objectives.

PRINCIPLES OF THE FRAMEWORK

14. The parties to this Concordat agree that the framework for the more effective career management of contract research staff should be based on the following principles:

- i. promoting the active personnel and career management of contract researchers, recognising the important contribution they make to the success of their employing institutions, including the dissemination of research results and new techniques;
- ii. acceptance by the universities and colleges of the importance of regular review and career guidance for contract researchers, to ensure that they receive appropriate and timely advice, support, and encouragement to develop their careers and to take responsibility for so doing;
- iii. an understanding between the funding bodies and the universities and colleges of their respective roles and responsibilities
 - (a) in meeting the costs associated with management of these staff, including career guidance and retraining or other appropriate arrangements to realise broader career opportunities upon the expiry of the contract researcher's fixed-term appointment;
 - (b) in keeping under review funding levels for personal or longer-term forms of support in academic research.

15. These principles are elaborated in the remainder of the Concordat.

STANDARDS OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

16. The responsibility for determining the detailed personnel and career management arrangements for contract research staff is for the universities and colleges as the employers.

17. However, the funding bodies will wish to be satisfied, as a key condition of providing grants and fellowships to the universities and colleges, that those institutions have in place and apply effective policies ensuring standards for the following aspects of the career management of contract researchers:

- i. recruitment, so that the opportunities provided by contract research posts are, as far as possible known and used

- to provide research training and continuing development for researchers at an early stage of a research career, which may subsequently be pursued in academia, industry, commerce, or the wider public sector; or
 - for the planned career development of existing contract staff, again with the possibility of that development subsequently taking place in academia, industry, commerce, or the wider public sector; or
 - as "re-entry" routes for researchers who have taken time out from their careers;
- ii. performance management arrangements, to ensure that research supervisors provide effective research environments for the training and development of researchers. In addition, there should be in place systems of:
- supervision, in order that contract researchers gain the maximum benefit from the training and development opportunities provided by the research environment in which they work;
 - regular review, enabling the contract researcher and his or her supervisor - and ultimately the university or college as the employer - to form the best possible assessment of, and feedback on, the individual's potential, whether for a research career in academia, industry, commerce, the wider public sector or in some other direction;
- iii. rewards and other terms and conditions of service for contract research staff (for example, rates of pay, provisions for leave and sick leave, pensions, access to facilities) which are in line with those for established staff, thus avoiding the tendency for contract researchers to feel isolated from, and disadvantaged in relation to those groups of employees. A key element is an assurance of equal opportunities and the elimination of practices linked to the short-term nature of contracts which indirectly discriminate against women. Maternity leave and pay provisions for contract staff should be in line with the provisions for established staff, subject to the fixed-term period of the employment contract;
- iv. in-service training in the form of appropriate specialist or general training. Demonstrating and teaching duties should be encouraged within the limits set by grant conditions;
- v. career guidance and development, for example to inform decisions by contract research staff on a change of career direction if the opportunities are limited or if they do not wish to remain in research or are not suited to such a career, and encouragement of talented researchers with advice on opportunities inside and outside the employing institution.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

18. The management and operation of these policies will generally be for the university and college employers alone.

19. The salaries element of grants will provide for pay appropriate to responsibility (grade), merit pay, and pensions. These should be identified in the grant application or will be allowed for in the cash-limiting of the award, enabling the funding bodies to meet them within the framework of cash-limited grants.

20. An application for funding for one or more named members of contract research staff should include provision for salary costs which takes account of the research responsibilities within the grant, but also, where relevant, the previous experience and professional contribution of those staff. Such applications may seek provision for promotion during the lifetime of the grant where the possibility is foreseen by the employing institution, the grounds are justified in the application, and the promotion will be made in accordance with the policies and procedures of the employing institution. In other cases, provision may be made from virement within the grant.

21. Contract research staff are generally paid on one of two different sets of salary scales according to whether their employment is in a pre-1992 university or in a post-1992 university or higher education college. The funding bodies will provide for salaries on the basis of spine points on the salary scales issued by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) in respect of pre-1992 universities and post-1992 universities and colleges.

22. Where a grant application includes provision for named contract research staff, the funding bodies will normally expect to announce funds at the level requested; however, they reserve the right to offer support at an alternative level if considered appropriate to the research responsibilities of the project.

23. In the case of unnamed contract research staff, the salaries element will normally provide for an appointment at spine point 6 which is the third point of Research Grade IA or the equivalent in post-1992 universities and colleges. Provision may however be made for an appointment at higher points, including grade ranges II or III (or their equivalent), where the application so requests it and has made explicit, to the funding body's satisfaction, that the research responsibilities would justify such an appointment and that the project would offer the opportunity for the career development of a more experienced individual.

24. Provision of paid maternity leave and sick pay to members of contract research staff who fulfil the relevant qualifying conditions of the employing institution is an allowable use of the salaries element of grants.

25. As a special initiative which contributes to the wider policy of encouraging the participation of women in research, the Research Councils will provide additional funding (which should be claimed, as necessary, at the end of the grant as an "exceptional item") to provide for any additional final cost on the grant:

- i. of making a substitute appointment to compensate for the whole, or part, of a period of paid maternity leave of a member of contract research staff funded by a Research Council, provided always that the direct salary costs of the substitute do not exceed those of the member of staff on paid maternity leave;
- ii. of extending the duration of a grant for a period equivalent to the maternity leave taken by a member of contract research staff for which no substitute appointment has been made, so that the project may be completed.

26. Where a period of paid sick leave in excess of 3 months is likely to affect the completion of a Research Council funded project, the grant holder may apply to the Research Council to discuss the possibility of funding a temporary appointment to safeguard the work of the project, or an extension to the duration of the grant where

the period of leave can be predicted. Any additional payment will be made at the end of the grant, as in paragraph 25.

27. The funding bodies will not provide funding to meet the potential redundancy costs of contract research staff whose employment ends on the expiry of the fixed-term contract. However, individual funding bodies may agree to contribute appropriately to contractual redundancy payments at the termination of any open-ended appointments which they had approved.

28. Since the dual-support transfer, the Research Councils provide a payment which is a standard percentage addition (40 per cent) of the staffing element of the "direct" costs of a research grant. Those funds are intended to meet the "indirect" costs of the research in accordance with the dual support arrangements. They therefore enable institutions to support, among other things, personnel administration and management, and in-service training.

29. The universities and colleges, on the one hand, and the funding bodies on the other will work to ensure as far as possible that applications are submitted, decisions taken and new grant announcements made so that fair recruitment procedures can be followed by the employing institutions; and that the renewal or extension of existing grants will be as early as possible so that career insecurity is reduced and disruption to the research effort is minimised.

WIDER ISSUES

30. To support career development, the universities, colleges, and funding bodies will need to work closely together:

i. the funding bodies share a common interest with the universities and colleges in identifying potential research leaders, and ensuring that career openings exist for them in research. Research fellowships offer a good stepping-stone, after an initial period of post-doctoral work, to a more permanent academic post or a research post, which may be in academia, industry, commerce, or the wider public sector. Individual institutions may wish to consider whether to provide such fellowships as part of their staffing policy, and the funding bodies will develop their own provisions in balance with other forms of research funding providing longer-term support for essential and active research leaders;

ii. university and college employers should keep under review the career opportunities for contract research staff who, whether or not research leaders, have proven their capacity to make a significant contribution over the longer-term to the research aims of the institution, and if so how to fund them. Advice to the individual concerned is likely to depend on his or her potential, on whether the research opportunities require his or her in-depth expertise, and on whether the costs of such support, as reflected in project or programme grants, infrastructure awards or such other individual forms of longer-term support as a funding body may provide, represent good value for money for that body. The funding bodies will consider such cases on that basis and on their merits;

iii. many other contract research staff will be well equipped after a doctorate or initial period of post-doctoral research for employment in industry, commerce or the public sector. The Research Councils are exploring a variety of funding mechanisms to encourage such transfer and they will consider further provisions in this area;

iv. the funding bodies will, with the universities, colleges and other interested parties, consider ways of strengthening the provision of career information and advice for contract research staff and fellows.

31. In addition, the funding bodies may be able to provide forms of research support which are not directly relevant to career management of contract research staff, but which do affect the number of such staff in universities and colleges. Examples include fellowships or research grants which enable principal investigators to concentrate on research by funding the costs of replacement teachers, and research studentships rather than research assistantships. Where appropriate, the funding bodies will keep their level of support for such alternatives under review in the light of their individual missions.

IMPLEMENTATION

32. The funding bodies will amend with effect from 1 September 1996 their conditions for new grants to reflect the provisions of this Concordat.

33. As conditions of grant, the funding bodies will require universities and colleges to provide:

i. contract research staff with a statement, at the beginning of the contract period, of their provisions for career development and management and conditions of employment;

ii. some basic information in grant/fellowship reports on the training and development benefits which have flowed from individual grants and fellowships, and on the destination of contract research staff and fellows after a grant or fellowship.

34. Concerns about implementation by an employing institution or a funding body should be addressed initially to that body.

EVALUATION OF THE CONCORDAT

35. The parties to this Concordat will meet initially after 18 months and subsequently every two years to review this Concordat and its implementation, taking account of e.g.:

- practice within funding bodies, universities and colleges, including initiatives and examples of good practice;
- levels of support for the forms of funding identified in paragraphs 30 and 31;
- information derived from grant/ fellowship final reports and destinations data;
- the outcome of equal opportunity monitoring of contract research staff appointments, including the proportion and distribution by grade of women;
- the costs of implementation;
- the views of employers in industry, commerce, and the wider public sector.

SIGNATORIES

36. The parties to this Concordat are:

- The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
- The Standing Conference of Principals
- The Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals
- The Research Councils
- The Royal Society
- The British Academy